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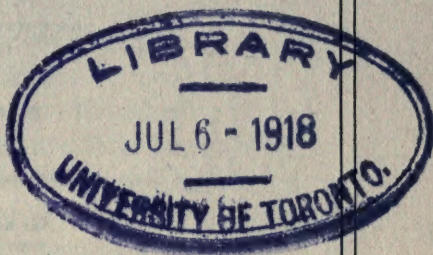
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ENGLAND AND AMERICA

By

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ENGLAND AND AMERICA

Among the Allies of the United States on the Western Front in France, England is on the whole regarded with least favor by the Americans of the Middle West. This is probably to be explained in part by the fact that two large elements in our foreign-born population, the Germans and the Irish, are and long have been violently anti-English. No doubt it is to be explained in part also by the facts of our national history as they have been set forth in the school textbooks of the last generation. Most of us who contribute to the formation of public sentiment were brought up to regard England primarily as the enemy of our national liberties in the Revolution and the violator of our rights of trade in the War of 1812. When the French sent Lafayette and even the Germans von Steuben to fight on our side, England sent Lord Howe and Lord Cornwallis to subdue us. Facts like these are bred in our bones, and they furnish excellent material to the German sympathizers for the development of anti-English sentiment among us.

In a certain measure also this sentiment is fostered by the English themselves. We do not see many Englishmen in the Middle West, and the chance one whom we are likely to encounter proves on the whole to be uncongenial to our middle-western temper. He is not a likable fellow according to our standards. He speaks our language, but with a difference, and generally with precisely that sort of a difference which we usually associate with the dude and the snob in our funny papers and in our farce comedies. His clothes are loose where we think they ought to be tight and tight where we think they ought to be loose. His shoes, which he will call boots, are obviously wrong. He has strange names indeed for the commonest objects. Worst of all he does not laugh at our jokes, and his own feeble attempts to be funny persuade us that he has at best a strangely perverted sense of humor. If he were frankly a foreigner we would accept him as such and concede to him perhaps the right to be different. But he is just enough like us to appear to be a freak of our own breed. His very similarities

accentuate his differences. A bulldog might take up with a greyhound, but no self-respecting bulldog can make friends with another bulldog whose nose lacks the proper wrinkles and whose ears and tail are hung at the wrong angles.

All this Anglophobia is very unfortunate, particularly at a time when the successful prosecution of the war demands the closest possible co-operation and the strongest possible sympathy between the English and ourselves. And a great deal of it is without any real foundation. The questions of shoes and clothes and even humor may be dismissed at once. We could hardly get on with our next-door neighbor if we were not prepared to admit his right to a difference of opinion in such matters. There is really no more reason why we should decry England because we dislike her tastes in words or in raiment than that we should decry the Bostonian because he calls a washstand a commode and likes baked beans for breakfast.

The historical prejudice is more serious, though fortunately it is giving way to a better understanding of the part which England has played in the making of America. Our children have better textbooks than we had. They know that the efforts of the English government to coerce the American colonies at the time of the Revolution met with almost as much opposition from liberal sentiment in England as from liberal sentiment in America. They know that the foremost Englishmen of the times, men like William Pitt and Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox, openly espoused the American cause. They know, in short, that the Revolution was not so much a war between America and England as between liberalism and conservatism on both sides of the Atlantic. We had our Tories over here in 1776, plenty of them, who supported Lord North and his policy of oppression just as England had her liberals over there, plenty of them, who opposed him. And it is not easy to say whether the defeat of Cornwallis by the Americans at Yorktown or the defeat of Lord North by the English liberals in the House of Commons contributed more to the termination of the Revolution. Certainly when the English liberals came into power they proceeded at once to negotiate a peace with America on the basis of independence.

Our children are even beginning to regard the War of 1812 somewhat differently from what we were taught to regard it. It clearly arose out of England's efforts to enforce an effective blockade against Napoleon. She had to face then, as she has to face now, the menace of a militaristic power seeking to dominate the whole Western World. Her most effective weapon was her fleet and the readiest means at her disposal to strike at her enemy was to cut off his foreign trade. Inevitably her blockade of French ports interfered with the free trading rights of neutrals. Inevitably American traders suffered and remonstrated. We have suffered in the same way by the British blockade of German ports during the present war. But we recognize more clearly now than we did then that the triumph of militarism in Europe is fraught with greater disaster even to America than a temporary interference with her trade. The German government tried hard three years ago to embroil us with England over this question of blockade just as Napoleon tried to embroil us with her in 1812. Kaiser Wilhelm, we thank heaven, failed; Napoleon, we know, succeeded. A comparison of the two situations sets us to wondering whether we were not after all, in spite of some legitimate grievances, exactly the same sort of tool in Napoleon's hands in 1812 as the German Emperor tried to make of us in 1915. The matter is certainly open to question. In any event our experience in the present world-war ought to enable us to see that there is something to be said for England's side of the case in the world-war of 1812.

Yet even if we insist that both in the Revolution and in the War of 1812 America was altogether right and England altogether wrong we shall have to admit that the story of Anglo-American relations does not begin nor end there. We must not forget that during the first two centuries of our history we were politically a part of England; nor should we regard those two centuries, as we too often do, merely as a period of preparation for the breach with England which was to follow. Strange as it may seem, there are more significant facts in our colonial history than Navigation Acts, Writs of Assistance, Boston Tea Parties, and such like matters. Perhaps the fundamental fact is that during the formative period of our national growth we were, in spite of developing differences,

still essentially English. Our language was English, our laws were English, our political and social institutions were English, our habits of thought, our point of view, our very standards of right and wrong were English. We were even prepared to assert by force of arms that our political ideals were English. There is no doubt about these facts. They are indeed such commonplaces that textbook histories have scarcely deemed them worth the mentioning. Yet they are the facts which have given our nation its character. The Revolution did not change them, political independence has not changed them. Our language, our customs, our laws, our moral standards, our political ideals are still very much what they were at the beginning. In the development of our national civilization we have borrowed much from Germany, much from France, much from other treasuries the world over. We should not fail to acknowledge the debt. But we owe most of all to England. Take away from America all that is English within her and she would be a wilderness again.

Even apart from this, it is a curious state of affairs that our sentiments toward England have been more influenced by the fact that we fought two wars against her a century ago than by the fact that we have lived next door to her in peace for over a hundred years. Of course it may be argued that we have, for that matter, lived in peace during the same period with all the other great European powers. But England is after all the only one of the great powers in a position seriously to menace our security. She dominates our ocean highways; in the Bermudas she holds a naval base at our very doors; in Canada she commands our whole northern frontier. And yet these matters trouble us very little. Out here in the Middle West we rarely hear of the Bermudas, except in connection with nothing more warlike than spring potatoes, and as for our undefended northern frontier it disturbs us no more than does the fact that the hedge between our back yard and our neighbor's will not stand siege. Frenchmen and Germans are amazed by our indifference at what would seem to them vital matters of defense. We in turn are mildly amazed at their amazement. The truth is that we hardly realize how altogether unique a thing it is for two powerful nations to live side by

side in peace without the normal European accompaniment of standing armies and bristling frontiers. And this is not because our differences with England during the past hundred years have been trivial. As a matter of fact they have been grave, far graver than those we have had with any other great power. It is rather because there has grown up between America and England during a century of peace a conception of international relationship different from the conceptions current in the Old World. As a nation we simply don't think of England in terms of war any more than as individuals we think of our next-door neighbor in terms of the duel. We dispute with him, we say nasty things about him, we may go so far as to hale him to court on occasions, but we don't load guns and sharpen knives against him even in our most belligerent moods. In the same way our disputes with England inevitably formulate themselves in terms of discussion, of abuse, or, as a final resort, of arbitration. Somehow or other we have long since ceased to reckon on their going any farther. We may explain it as we will, the fact stands fast. That undefended frontier stretching from Maine to the Pacific establishes it beyond dispute.

The trouble is that too often we don't bother to explain it at all. We accept it, we even acknowledge it to be one of our great national assets, and then, as like as not, we stop thinking about it. To tell the truth, before the present war we were not given to speculating much about European nations or our relations with them. Long ago President Monroe formulated our national attitude of mind in such matters when he said that we did not intend to meddle in the affairs of Europe and that we expected Europe not to meddle in ours. We have not meddled; we have indeed deliberately ignored. The consequence has been that in the case of England our knowledge of the country proves to be a curious crazy quilt patched together out of such odds and ends as schoolboy prejudices against red coats, Irish-American Anglophobia, the jokes in our comic supplements, and the scandals in our daily press. That is why it was so easy for the German propagandists during the early years of this Great War to poison our minds against England. Had we known England better they would have labored to no purpose. As it was they succeeded far too well.

Yet it can hardly be denied that quite apart from the exigencies of the present war England has a special claim upon our intelligent understanding. And this is so not simply because we share with her a common heritage and a common culture, not simply because she is our next-door neighbor in Canada, but above all things else because she is the great European exponent of our own democratic ideals of government. It is indeed hardly too much to say that she is the mother of European democracy. In the seventeenth century, when the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs and the Hohenzollerns were rapidly eliminating all popular elements from the governments of Continental Europe, the English were cutting off the head of one king, driving another into exile, and establishing for good and all the principle of the sovereignty of the people. In the eighteenth century when absolutism was almost universal on the European mainland England had in working order a system of parliamentary government which had not only taken away from her king all his legislative powers but was also making large encroachments upon his executive powers. It was to England that our own forefathers turned for a model when they undertook to organize a democratic government for independent America. In the early decades of the nineteenth century it was to the English system that the political reformers of Continental Europe pointed as the goal of their own efforts toward liberalism. When democracy after a century of struggle finally triumphed in France in 1875, she modeled her constitution on English lines. Italy did the same thing. So did Spain; so did Portugal. Even in Germany the program of the Liberal Reform party is today essentially an English program. We in America fondly believe our own government to be the best existing expression of democracy in power. Liberal Europe with our own example before its eyes has preferred the English one.

This is a hard morsel for us to swallow because it is hard for us to comprehend that popular government can find expression in other forms besides that of a republic. England we know has a king; England is therefore a monarchy, and if she is a monarchy she cannot in the very nature of things be democratic. Such is the drift of our argument. The fallacy of it lies in the assumption that

because England has a king she is therefore governed by a king. As a matter of fact, which everyone knows who has the slightest acquaintance with English institutions, the king of England is merely a figurehead. He reigns, but he has long since ceased to govern. Men say in England that the king can do no wrong. What they mean is that politically he cannot do anything at all. The power which is nominally his is really exercised by a group of ministers who constitute the cabinet. And these ministers are nothing more in essence than an executive committee of the English House of Commons. Their tenure of office depends upon their ability to command the support of a majority of the members of that house. When they can no longer command that support they must give place to others who can. The king, it is true, names them, but it would be idle for him to name anyone not acceptable to the House of Commons, and as a matter of fact he never does. Everything which the cabinet does is done in his name, for he remains the symbol of the executive power. But he is no more responsible for these doings than George Washington is responsible for the two-cent stamps which bear his image.

The English Parliament is in fact the source of all governmental power in England. It makes all the laws and through the instrumentality of the cabinet it executes them all. Without doubt it is the most powerful assembly in the world. Our own national Congress is limited in its powers by the terms of our national constitution. Congress cannot change our constitution. It cannot, except under very unusual circumstances, name our chief executive; it cannot, except for grave misbehavior, remove him. It cannot legislate in matters of purely local concern. But the English Parliament can and does do all of these things. It can change the fundamental laws of England overnight; it can and does regularly choose and remove the English chief executive; it can and does legislate about the pettiest of local matters. England, in fact, though she calls herself a monarchy is governed not by a king but by a parliament, and the question as to whether her government is democratic or not can only be answered when we have decided whether or not government by parliament means government of the people, for the people, and by the people.

Everybody knows that the English Parliament like our own Congress is made up of two houses, a House of Lords and a House of Commons. And pretty nearly everybody knows that the House of Lords is not, in our American sense of the term, a representative body at all. The great majority of its members sit either because their fathers sat before them or else because the king has expressly invited them to sit. It is true that the king's invitation is really given by the prime minister, and it is true also that a large majority of those invited could properly be considered representative Englishmen in the best sense of the term, but the same thing might almost be said of the House of Lords in Prussia. Liberal Englishmen have indeed long realized that the House of Lords is an anomaly in a democratic system of government. They have long entertained projects for changing its composition and curtailing its powers and within the past ten years have taken one very definite step forward in that direction. Since the so-called Parliament Act of 1911 the Lords have lost all power over financial legislation and have retained only a limited power to delay legislation of any other sort. Yet even with these limitations it must be conceded that the House of Lords is out of place in a modern democracy and can only be justified on the grounds that it has had a long and a distinguished history. The same thing can be said of some historic survivals in our own constitution. No doubt we ought to get rid of them; no doubt we don't, or at least only very slowly. Yet we very properly resent the suggestion that we are therefore undemocratic. We claim to be judged not only by our political performances but also by our political ideals and by the general direction of our progress toward them. England is entitled to the same consideration. Judging by those standards the significant fact is, not that England has inherited a House of Lords which is inconsistent with her democratic professions, but that she recognizes the inconsistency, deplors it, has taken steps already and promises to take others to correct it.

When the worst has been said that can be said about the House of Lords, the fact remains that the essential powers of the English Parliament reside in its other House, the House of Commons. It not only has the decisive voice in making the laws of England but

it chooses the instruments to execute them. It is the Commons and not the Lords who decide what ministers shall govern England, in what manner they shall govern her, and for how long they shall govern her. In America we distinguish between the executive and the legislative branches of our government. Both proceed ultimately from the people, but they proceed in a different way and at a different time. This is so much the case that the president whom we elect at one time may belong to a different party from the Congress which we elect at another time. In England that could never be so. There must always be an agreement between the House of Commons and the ministers because the ministers can only retain their position so long as their policy agrees with that of the Commons. A striking illustration of this fact was offered only the other day when General Maurice made certain charges in the public press against Mr. Lloyd George, the prime minister. The matter was brought to the attention of the House of Commons and became the subject there of a debate and of a vote. The Commons, as it happened, supported the minister, but if they had supported the opposition there is little doubt but that Mr. Lloyd George would have been forced to resign office.

His only alternative would have been to appeal from the House of Commons to the English people. Such an appeal is provided for by the custom of the English constitution, for if it maintains that the English ministry shall reflect the prevailing opinion of the House of Commons it also maintains that the House of Commons shall reflect the prevailing opinion of its constituencies. If Mr. Lloyd George, even though defeated in the Commons, had felt confident that the English voters favored him, he might have dismissed the House of Commons and invited the voters to choose a new one which would support him. He could, in a word, have submitted his policy to a popular referendum. In this particular the English system is rather more democratic than our own. Our president continues to hold office for the four-year term of his election, though he may cease to reflect the popular will before he has served a year. It is the same way with our Congress. In England the House of Commons can get rid of an unpopular minister or a popular minister can get rid of an unpopular House

of Commons in no longer time than it takes to refer the question to the voters.

Enough has been said to show that the sovereign power in England lies in the House of Commons. It remains to be considered how far the House of Commons really represents the English people.

The answer to this question is far simpler today than it would have been a year ago. The war, which has so marvelously quickened the progress of England toward democracy, has given her within the last few months a parliamentary franchise which is a great deal simpler and on the whole a great deal more liberal than the congressional franchise in our own country. Practically every adult Englishman and a considerable proportion of the adult Englishwomen will have the right to vote for members of the next House of Commons.¹ But the condition of the franchise when the present House of Commons was elected was far different and far more characteristic of England as she was in normal days of peace. This ante-bellum parliamentary franchise was, it must be confessed, a confused and complicated affair, interesting historically but not easy to justify from any rational point of view. It was in fact the result of endless patchings and alterations of old institutions to meet new conditions. Parts of it survived from a time long before Columbus set sail for America. Other parts of it were added within the last forty years. It would hardly be worth while to analyze it in detail. The net result of it was that by curiously

¹ The terms of the new English parliamentary franchise are set forth in the Reform Act which became law in England on February 7, 1918. It confers the franchise upon every man in Great Britain and Ireland over twenty-one years of age who has resided in the same place or occupied business premises in the same place for six months preceding the election. It confers the franchise upon every woman in Great Britain and Ireland over thirty years of age who has heretofore enjoyed the privilege of voting in local elections or who is the wife of a local elector. (The qualifications for the local franchise is six months' ownership or tenancy of land or premises. Lodgers in furnished rooms do not qualify.)

It is estimated that this Reform Act has added 8,000,000 voters to the lists, of whom 6,000,000 are women (5,000,000 of them married women) and 2,000,000 are men. With these additions there will be about 16,000,000 people in Great Britain and Ireland qualified to vote for members of the House of Commons—or about one in three of the population. (Cf., for a more detailed statement of the terms of this Reform Act, the *London Times*, weekly ed., February 18, 1918, p. 145.)

indirect ways it did arrive at something not far short of manhood suffrage. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about it was that though it debarred many from the franchise its discriminations were not undemocratic in spirit. It did not favor the rich as against the poor, the well educated as against the ill educated, the highborn as against the lowborn. Doubtless it was absurd, yet doubtless for all its absurdity it distributed the voting power among the different social classes in the community in just about the same way as we distribute it on this side the seas. In England as in America the representative assembly was chosen, as it will be chosen, by the general mass of the common people. There as with us the government derives its powers from their consent.

The charge is commonly made by German critics that in spite of the apparent liberalism of the English constitution England is in fact governed by a Tory aristocracy. What they mean by a Tory aristocracy is not altogether clear, but apparently they would have us believe that it is a class of people in England analogous to the landed aristocracy, that is to say, the Junkers in Prussia. There is this much truth in the charge that the English voter prefers on the whole to be represented in the House of Commons by men of social position. But the German is altogether misleading when he attempts to draw an analogy between this state of affairs and the rule of the Junker class in Prussia. In Prussia the Junker dominates the so-called House of Representatives because the inequalities of the Prussian franchise make it practically impossible for the voters to elect representatives of any other sort. The English voter has full power to choose whom he likes, and if the English House of Commons is largely made up of the gentry it is because the English people will it so. They might very easily fill the House with chimney-sweeps tomorrow if they wanted to. What is more to the point, the English gentry retain their position simply upon condition that they reflect accurately the wishes of the people behind them. In Prussia Junker rule has meant legislation in the Junker interests. In England gentry rule has meant legislation in the popular interest. If the English gentry are really, as the Germans insist, Junkers in English clothes, then it is clear that during the last ten years or so these English Junkers

have been seriously contemplating suicide, for nowhere in the world perhaps during recent years has the landholding aristocracy suffered more severely from hostile legislation than in England. What with inheritance taxes, income taxes, unearned increment taxes, and the like the large English landowner bids fair to become an extinct animal. On the other hand nowhere perhaps in the world has recent legislation been more liberal in providing for the necessities of the poor. Old-age pensions for the aged poor and national insurance against sickness, disability, and unemployment for the laboring classes are sufficient evidences of that fact. More than that, in child-welfare acts, sweatshop regulations, minimum wage laws, and national employment bureaus England has gone much farther than we have ourselves in the direction of preventing the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Indeed the common complaint in England among the better-to-do classes is that recent legislation is much more than democratic; it is positively socialistic. If Tory aristocrats can do this sort of thing, then we are bound to confess that whatever their social pretensions may be their political ideals are quite as democratic as those of the meekest among us.

The fact is that whether we test the English government by its organization, by its leaders, or by its work, the truth of the statement is easily established that English ideals of government are essentially our ideals and that England has quite as fair a claim as we have ourselves to be numbered among the great democracies of the earth. That is the best of all the good reasons why the relations between America and England are and of right ought to be different from other international relations. That is why they belong side by side, shoulder to shoulder, in the war which is to make the world safe for democracy.

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